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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 1629
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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 2874
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 5871
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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000409

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL

ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that PM Ehud Olmert confirmed on Tuesday that he would meet with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on February 19.

Israel Radio quoted Olmert as saying on Tuesday that the Iranian nuclear program can be countered through non-violent means.

Major media reported that on Tuesday Islamic leaders called for a new wave of violence against Israel over an archeological excavation at the Mugrabi Gate near the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem. Ha'aretz and Hatzofe quoted Jordan's King Abdullah II as saying on Tuesday that the excavations are a "blatant violation that is not acceptable under any pretext." The King was quoted as saying that the activity "will only create an atmosphere that will not at all help in the success of efforts being undertaken to restore the peace process."

The media reported that on Tuesday PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas and Khaled Mashal, the head of Hamas's political bureau, met in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, ahead of their formal meeting in Mecca today. While The Jerusalem Post dubbed the parley "do or die" talks on unity, Ha'aretz said that it was beginning "in earnest."

Yediot cited information that reached the GOI that Syria has transferred state-of-the-art anti-tank rockets to Hizbullah.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Juan Guzman, the Chilean judge who indicted former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, is in Israel this week to study the feasibility of international legal action against Israeli decision-makers responsible for the demolition of Palestinian homes.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Tuesday, deflecting criticism for Israel, sources in UNIFIL cast doubt on claims made by the IDF that it has failed to properly perform its duties after five explosive devices were planted along the Israeli-Lebanese border in recent days by Hizbullah.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer is traveling to Germany and Japan this week to raise support for Israel's bid to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as a full member. Yediot reported that Israel is working to have its status of association with the EU upgraded to one similar to those of Switzerland and Norway.

The Jerusalem Post reported that on Tuesday Israel's Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi and other leading rabbis from around the world signed a declaration with leading Hindu leaders in New Delhi that denounces terrorism and violence.

Maariv reported that the Director-General of the Knesset, Avi Balashnikov, decided to reinforce the Parliament's building with concrete -- to protect it from Katyusha rocket strikes.

Yediot reported that Malaysia has invited Rami Mandel, the Director-General of the Co-Op supermarket chain, to a trade conference in Kuala Lumpur.

Yediot reported that Avishai Gottdiener, the PR and academic counselor at Israeli Embassy in Beijing, as saying the Chinese Communications University will send all its Hebrew-language students to Israel for a year of studies during the next academic year.

Leading media reported that Poland will invest USD 2 million in a marketing campaign meant to change Poland's image among Israelis.

All media reported that on Tuesday the cabinet unanimously named Law Prof. Daniel Friedman justice minister. The Knesset is expected to approve the nomination today. The media noted that Friedman, an Israel Prize recipient, is a fierce critic of the judicial system: In an article in Yediot on Friday, Friedman wrote that Israel was en route to becoming a police state.

Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday the Adelson family foundation announced a USD 25-million donation to the "Taglit-birthright israel" program, which funds free trips to Israel for young Jews from around the world. The donation, which senior Jewish officials in New York described as one of the largest given to a Jewish education program, will finance trips for some 10,000 young adults. Ha'aretz wrote that on Tuesday Las Vegas-based Sheldon Adelson, one of the world's richest men, lavished praise on Taglit, saying it

helps preserve the Jewish community against assimilation. Adelson, who until recently gave relatively little to Israel, has donated USD 54 million in Israel over the last three months, including USD 25 million to Yad Vashem.

All media reported on the death at 71 on Tuesday of conservative journalist Uri Porat, originally a Yediot newsman, who was media adviser to former PMs Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir and twice Director-General of the Israel Broadcasting Authority.

Mideast:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized:
"Palestinian leaders are merely exploiting the issue [of construction next to the Temple Mount] for political purposes, in an attempt to redirect hostility against Israel in the midst of a bloody internal conflict."

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Were I to believe that this lame government were capable of conspiring, I would say the Israeli excavations show that Israel doesn't stand aloof when Palestinian blood is spilled like water."

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz: "The Palestinian Authority will have trouble functioning even under a compromise agreement."

Columnist Hilary Leila Krieger wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The overblown rhetoric on the centrality of Palestine -- which has long had real consequences for Israel and the United States -- is now becoming more than verbiage for Arab states as well."

Block Quotes:

I. "Bridge Over Troubled Water"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/7):
"Palestinian leaders, whether from Fatah or Hamas, have been keen to find an excuse to divert attention from their internal problems. So it is not surprising that many have jumped on Israel's reconstruction of an access bridge to Jerusalem's Temple Mount. It was the perfect red-herring issue for Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and exiled Hamas leader Khaled Mashal, who held a much-touted 'national unity' summit in Mecca (sic) on Tuesday.... Palestinian leaders are plainly seeking to use this nonevent to reignite memories of Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount in 2000, which was used to catalyze the second Intifada. They evidently also see a Palestinian interest in a rerun of the violent clashes of 1996, after a second exit to the Western Wall tunnel was opened. Palestinians falsely claim the entire project is a clandestine Israeli plot to dig under and cause damage to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Actually, Palestinian leaders are merely exploiting the issue for political purposes, in an attempt to redirect hostility against Israel in the midst of a bloody internal conflict."

Such exploitation, so widely endorsed by the Palestinian leadership, is dismaying, if sadly unsurprising. Cynical appeals for a renewed Intifada and violent resistance discredit the purported Palestinian moderates, who are standing shoulder-to-shoulder with extremists' efforts to whip up hostility. Such appeals can only cause more bloodshed and despair. Any real concerns about the salvage and building work should, and patently could, be handled appropriately and calmly, through open dialogue and constructive debate."

II. "Sullyng the Silence"

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/7): "The Temple Mount is indeed in our hands, rough though they may be, but that doesn't mean it's appropriate to act as though others have no stake in that

territory. Were I to believe that this lame government were capable of conspiring, I would say the Israeli excavations show that Israel doesn't stand aloof when Palestinian blood is spilled like water. After all, the Palestinians will now put an end to their violent internecine clashes and turn their anger -- and perhaps also their arms -- toward Israel.... Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will show Benjamin Netanyahu that the Likud leader is not the only one who can rock the foundations of volatile coexistence... The Israel Antiquities Authority comes up with many damaging and unnecessary plans. When I was the minister responsible for deciding on such plans, I opposed them, even though they all seemed reasonable at the outset. If the works are not crucial or urgently needed to save lives, then it's best to steer clear of the compound of conflagration."

III. "No Democracy on the Horizon"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (2/7): "Despite optimistic forecasts of Fatah and Hamas reaching a compromise in Mecca, there is no doubt that the Palestinian national movement is at one of its lowest points in history. This stems from the fact that the Palestinians, who claim to be a coherent national entity, are admitting they are incapable of managing their own affairs, and are compelled to seek outside intervention.... But the hardest problem of all, which will remain unsolved, is that the Palestinian Authority will have trouble functioning even under a compromise agreement. No agreement will bridge all of the ideological gaps between the parties, and will only slightly assuage the violent power struggles. In other words, even the best Fatah-Hamas agreement will not turn Palestinian society into a Western democracy overnight. A traditional social structure, clan loyalties and political factionalism all create a need for an authoritarian leader, like those of the Palestinian Authority's Arab neighbors. Without a leader like Arafat, society collapses into the rule of violent gangs."

IV. "US Convinced Shi'ite Threat Pushing Sunnis Toward West"

Columnist Hilary Leila Krieger wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/7): "The argument that the ascendancy of Shi'ite Iran and its Hizbullah and Hamas allies has aroused sufficient fear in 'moderate' Sunni regimes to push them toward America, Israel and a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has gained considerable traction within the US administration.... The overblown rhetoric on the centrality of Palestine -- which has long had real consequences for Israel and the United States -- is now becoming more than verbiage for Arab states as well. They too, have to deal with their Frankenstein in the form of pumped up Islamic extremism."

JONES